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Is Decentralization of Control a Partial Answer in Big City School Districts?

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One possible solution to the problems of urban schools--such as student disenchantment, community tension, and teacher aggressiveness--is to give some of the control over school districts back to the communities themselves, that is, to reverse the trend of centralization. Concerning school government, three types of values need to be considered--those concerned with the school program, those having to do with the financing of education, and those having to do with the consumer of public education. A study of the Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky schools recommended a mixed pattern of educational government for that area, but the plan was never implemented. Nevertheless, experimentations with new forms of educational government are needed as a prelude to large-scale educational government reform. Two types of these experiments are invention and adaptation. Invention would include models of the completely planned, future-oriented urban environment without reference to existing economic, political, or social institutions. The adaptation model would be created out of existing social, political, and economic systems but capable of substantial adaptation to achieve a set of logically determined values. Decentralization is concluded to be no more than a partial answer in big-city school districts. (HW)

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IS DECENTRALIZATION OF CONTROL A PARTIAL
ANSWER IN BIG CITY SCHOOL DISTRICTS?

by

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We throw words around indiscriminately these days. Crisis is an example. It probably is not at all an appropriate or useful term anymore. The media have effectively emasculated the word. Nevertheless we use it--over and over again. Now we employ the notion to describe our current uncertainties within or about school organization.

Certainly there is widespread anxiety about educational organization shared by laymen and professionals alike. Ironically targeted interests such as improving the teaching of reading, acquiring social values or sharpening motor skills shift quickly to examinations of educational organization. Discussion of organization too often begins with an apology. "Organization really doesn't make much difference--its what goes on in the classroom that really counts." The facts are that organization does make a difference. That's why we always turn to the subject. And decentralization is one significant form of organizational change that large cities must examine thoughtfully and thoroughly.

Citizen, student and teacher pressures are upsetting our traditional thinking about educational organization and concomitantly decision making within organization. In my judgment the product of these clashes will be healthier institutions. So, on with the fray.

A sprinkling of extremists would have us smash all traditional conceptions of educational organization--indeed such may be necessary in some cases. Creating entirely new institutions may be required where men of good intentions can find no way to overcome the dysfunctional

features of large scale bureaucracy. But I doubt this will be necessary across the board.

The "destroy" alternative is seductive. We can get all wrapped up emotionally in organizational genocide with no one assuming responsibility for drafting a new institutional design. Following this alternative we would find ourselves disconsolately rummaging through the ruins, looking for rubble to use in the invention of new institutions.

Things are bad but they're not that bad. Anarchy would only produce new tyrannies. Our responsibility it seems to me is to face our imperfections squarely--inequity, prejudice, discrimination, powerlessness, alienation--and deal with them. We are faced, probably for the first time, with the imperative of bringing our ideals into juxtaposition with reality. John Gardner's language is eloquently reassuring:

The effort to educate all our citizens entails certain consequences. It means mass education. It means crowded schools and huge universities. It means devising educational programs for youngsters who will grow up to be plumbers and farmers as well as for those who will grow up to be philosophers and art critics. In short, it is a very different system from one designed to educate young aristocrats for the role of cultivated gentlemen. We have set ourselves a task of astonishing dimensions. And having set ourselves these objectives, we cannot weep because our educational system no longer resembles the cozy, tidy world we deliberately put behind us.¹

Organizational tensions are emanating from three interrelated but sharply conflicting centers of power. And each of these power arenas is marked by internal differences and stresses which make life even more interesting.

Student Disenchantment

Professor Nystrand at Ohio State University has just completed a study of student unrest in selected secondary schools in five cities.² He found a variety of student feelings about life in those schools many of which were deep seated. Their sentiments were, however, based upon matters over which school officials have some control. Remarkably few of the student leaders of boycotts, walkouts, demonstrations or marches on boards of education wanted to obliterate the existing system and start over. Their frustrations which escalated into violence or near violence were understandable and probably justified. Although the participants in riots or other types of demonstrations included all types of students the leaders were bright, often alienated young men and women.

A short time ago I met one evening with a hundred junior and senior high school students who were forming a city wide(out of school) student organization. The questions addressed to me were searching, penetrating, exciting. But the evening was saturated with hostility toward "the establishment." And the establishment included me, the school system, all adults, even their peer group conformists who in their judgment were selling out to the "system."

Similarly in interviews with student walkout leaders in other places the grievances students have expressed are such that not only evoke sympathy but should be responded to organizationally. For example, one student said "...black children do not leave their problems on the

doorstep of the inner city high school. They take them into these high schools--problems they face in their community, problems of life, problems that black people really face. They take into the schools their hate for the white people that they meet, not only in the community, but prejudiced white people who take offices in the schools ... black students cannot leave their brains, or their hatred, or their determination on the doorstep of the school."³

The prejudice indictment is severe but not unexpected nor a phenomenon which should be ignored by school officials. Racial prejudice among teachers, counselors or administrators must be dealt with--not swept under the rug as we have been prone to do in the past. It is ironic that part of the pressure for facing prejudice head-on should come from students. It is also refreshing.

Student anxiety turns on such things as prejudice, curricular irrelevancy, and lack of access to the decision system of the school. All of these are matters to which school officials can and must respond.

Community Tension

A few weeks ago a national task force based at Ohio State completed a survey of new forms of citizen participation in school affairs for the Urban Coalition. The team reviewed developments in thirteen cities including some examples of "community control" within established large city school districts. The similarity is remarkable between the aspirations

of disenchanted students and disappointed adults who want to share in educational decisions. Each wants political access, curricular reform especially in the arena of social issues, enhanced attention to and respect for the problems of each child, sustained communication between students and the schools and citizens and the schools.⁴

There is a lot of fuzzy thinking about community control--and about decentralization. The concepts of community control and decentralization are frequently confused, sometimes treated synonymously and almost certain to evoke emotions. The concepts are not the same. Many forms of decentralization have been implemented or proposed thus far. But no genuine new form of community control has been achieved.

The facts are that many people--blacks and whites--would like a share of the action. Many people--blacks and whites--feel they have been denied a piece of the action. And what's more they have given every indication that from this point forward they are going to have not a piece of the action, but in some cases, all of the action.

Decentralization most often is considered as an administrative device--a way of delegating authority and responsibility closer to the grass roots--but within a larger defined authority system. Community control means "people" control, constituent control, client control. Citizens are responsible for decisions about educational matters ranging from the obviously trivial to the most fundamental policy questions. Citizens retain the right and the obligation to negotiate personnel matters, establish curricula,

set calendar, determine who has the right to attend public schools, and to secure and expend public monies.

Community control is what historically we have taken such deep pride in. Our educational history is burdened with recitations of the virtues of local control and responsibility. To many of us who have lived and experienced community control (at its worst as well as its very best) today's excitement is difficult to understand. Many of us in this room have not however experienced genuine community control. Some of us who attended the one room rural school where educational policy was in fact developed at the school district annual meeting each June have experienced it.

Today the storm over community control centers is in the black ghettos of our cities. That's not to say that there are not significant anxieties about community control elsewhere. But the critical areas are the ghettos. In this arena there has been absolutely no experience with self-government of any kind, least of all education. Furthermore it is for this reason that we must live through the agonies of extreme decentralization including community control if our inner city Americans are going to develop any kind of capacity for self-government. It is for this reason that substantial transformations in local governments are high priority issues in American life.

I attended a one-room rural school in Washington County, Nebraska for my elementary education. Our one-room little white frame school house--(with two P.W.A. financed frame out-houses a respectable distance

behind the citadel of learning) was the only school in the district. The school board had three members--a director, a moderator, and a treasurer. My father was the treasurer--an attractive job because he delivered the check each month to the teacher, usually young and female. The board met once a month if necessary but frequently it wasn't necessary. There were very few demonstrations, strikes or boycotts in those days--but there certainly should have been. The annual meeting each June was a social affair as well as a political event. The wives of board members arranged the social part; the board members planned their strategies for either being re-elected to the board or getting off the board with grace and dignity; and the kids had a coeducational ball out on the playground.

The annual meeting usually had two basic agenda items (1) election of the board members; and (2) establishing the budget. Both items were obviously related. Sometimes there was a third item: whether or not there would be enough kids next year to keep the school open. You had to have five. Sometimes you could sneak by with less than five if there were enough pregnant women living in the district. There needed to be visible evidence of population growth.

Those June meetings were exciting. Women socializing in rural fashion; men making educational policy. What we have to do in our ghettos is invent the grass rootism that served so well in rural America. The capacity to self-govern locally has grown in many sections of rural America--not in all--to the point where extreme community control is no longer necessary or desirable. Maturity has set in--not so in the ghetto.

Our extraordinary commitment to community control and decentralization has allowed us to perpetuate substantial inequities in school support. We are all familiar with them so there is no need to specify them this afternoon.

Many proponents of community control believe that all (fundamental and trivial) decisions about education are the right, responsibility, even the obligation of parents. So firmly is this position held that the existence

of racially apartheid schools is preferred to forms of organization that would allow for racially mixed educational experiences. Opponents of this posture such as John R. Everett believe "...it is folly to think that the average nonprofessional citizen would have either the time or the inclination to keep up with the mountain of reports, articles, and books on these (educational) subjects each year. Here, lay boards must trust professionals, and the school system will meet community needs in exact proportion to the skill and effectiveness of the professional and his freedom from local community pressures."⁵

The discussion swirling about community control would be ludicrous if it were not so critical to those who now are discovering its meaning. For the first time large numbers of people are taking it seriously, especially in black, lower class neighborhoods. Community control has been practiced (imperfectly) for decades in thousands of the nation's school districts.⁶ Just a few years ago we had well over 100,000 local units of school government (most of them rural) with tax levying authority. Each one had its own board composed of laymen. Tragically we discovered that this pattern of educational government was not serving us well, at least as we defined our needs at that time. Now we find ourselves confronted with the prospect of reproducing those events in our large cities. And I think we must reproduce those events. Ghetto residents must make decisions and assume responsibility for the educational decisions affecting the lives of their children.

Teacher Aggressiveness

The press for participation on the part of teachers--aggressive and militant--in many cases is running head long into the hostilities of students and parents. The conflict is no longer intellectual or academic. It is physical as was so visibly demonstrated in Ocean Hill-Brownsville last autumn and in Denver this January. Threats, indeed assaults, against teachers and administrators will undoubtedly continue. The tension between the organized profession and community groups in large cities is bound to grow. Parents want teachers to produce results in the classrooms--and the results are those to be specified by parents. Teachers expect protection against the encroachments of parents and students. They expect to exercise professional judgment about what is to be taught, and by whom,

Parent disquiet centers on the belief that teachers are not doing their jobs. Thus performance criteria or expectations will probably be included in future bargaining agreements. Achievement levels will be specified and salary proposals linked to performance expectations. Ghetto parents as well as parents in most other places think such proposals are reasonable. Discussions about appropriate performance criteria will sharpen issues quickly and draw attention dramatically toward overdue clarification of the goals and objectives of the schools.

From Here to Where

John Gardner has observed that the pressures and strain on institutions are particularly severe when people who have suffered oppression,

as have some of our minority groups , begin to see a chance for a better life . This is precisely what we have in our schools today: parents who see a chance for a better life for their children; teachers who see a chance for a better professional and personal life today , not next year; students who are crying out for a better shake for themselves now and not tomorrow.

The pressure cooker character of today's problems is not likely to be modified soon. Hopefully it will not change at least until we have responded to the issues which produced this environment. One of the genuine dangers I see is allowing ourselves to be stampeded into impotence.

We should perfect our capacity to anticipate and plan as well as deal immediately with deficiencies. The uniform observation shared by teachers, students and parents is that schools are non-responsive. When problems surface nothing is done about them.

But something can be done about them. Returning to my opening thesis, the features of organization do make a difference. Organization, any organization, can work at its problem. Most organizations--business, religious, academic--have a remarkable capacity for communicating indifference. Information flow is predominately one way (outward). Even when efforts are made to solicit reactions to the organization from parents and students their recommendations for change are frequently ignored. Usually we talk about organizational "openness" in this regard but our efforts to achieve openness usually fall short. But organizational openness can be achieved.

A place to start in our appraisal of decentralization is to face directly what we hope to achieve through educational government. It suggests too that we need to examine more thoroughly the implications of structure of educational government as far as the effective operation of schools is concerned. In developing adequate school government, initial attention needs to be given to the elaboration of a set of values that we hope to achieve through education itself. In thinking about school government, there appear to be three types of values that need to be considered.⁷

Values to be Achieved through Government

The first set of values has to do with the school program, the heart of the school. The first program value is the achievement of program diversity in response to variation in educational need. The second program value is the achieving of structural flexibility for realizing any program advantages in economies of scale, which derive from organizational bigness or organizational smallness. A third program value relates to the ability of the school system continuously to alter and improve its program. The fourth program value is the lodging of program decision-making as near as possible to the effected constituency, in the belief that education is served best when local interests are effectively expressed and when there is a free release of local energy in support of the schools.

A second set of values has to do with the financing of education. The problems of financing education will be with us always no doubt, and these become imperative in considering governmental organization for

education purposes. The first financial value is the efficient aggregation of resources. The best educational government is one that can achieve efficiency in the gathering together of monies to run the schools, and that can be creative in the location of available resources not being currently applied to the support of schools. A second and companion financial value is the equalization of the revenue burden. The problem in school system design is identifying the governmental unit or a system of units through which equality of burden can be achieved, and which at the same time does not do violence to an efficient and effective system of using resources. A third financial value is related to the perfection of mechanisms for the differential distribution of resources. Our goal would be to create an organizational structure or system of governments which can expedite the differential use of scarce resources. A fourth financial value is the development of mechanisms for decentralizing the responsibility for defining educational programs and effectively extending the responsibility for budget construction. And a fifth financial value is to ensure the best return on each dollar invested.

The final set of values has to do with the consumer of public education. The American people have tried strenuously to keep the public schools close to the citizens of the local communities. These efforts have grown out of a conviction that local citizens are in the best position to understand local conditions, needs, aspirations and abilities to carry on public education. The centralization of power and authority in large cities has made realization of this desire more difficult. The problems are those of bigness, impersonality, inability to respond to many problems, and too little time.

The first consumer value is the value of extending citizen participation or consumer opportunity for effecting educational policy making. We would say then that an adequate school government is one that develops and continues to refine an extended structure for citizen participation. Without it the schools will suffer from a feeling of helplessness and subsequent apathy and concern. Closely related to the first value is the second: acknowledging and responding to the variation in consumer demand for education. Thus we are seeking school government that will be sensitive to differences in demands to the point that citizens can agree to support schools differentially if they choose to do so, and possess the machinery of government which will respond to variation in demand.

The design of a school system for a large city needs to deal with both the big and the small. It needs to recognize the commonality of interests within the community as well as the diversity of interests between and among neighborhoods. A large city school government must provide structural flexibility in order to encourage imaginative people to exercise creative entrepreneurship in the provision of quality educational services necessary to meet the growing demands of a technologically advanced society.

Likewise, there is an emerging need to examine local school government in metropolitan terms. An enumeration of just a few of many reasons would include: (1) the inability of the state to perfect systems of school finance capable of taking care of inequalities in the ability to support education; (2) the vast variations in ability to finance schooling that exists

within our metropolitan areas; (3) flight of the middle class populations to the suburbs in search of improved public services and especially improved education; (4) the emotional factors which surround race and minority group problems in the core cities; (5) the lack of political access for individuals and groups in large cities; (6) the dysfunctional aspects of large size which seem to render large city school systems impotent; (7) the fragmented and diffuse suburban fringes which appear to be inefficient and ineffective in educational problem solving; (8) the absence in most metropolitan areas of an educational "needs identification structure," which contributes to many metropolitan area educational needs remaining unidentified.

In August of 1966 a team of university-based scholars which I had the privilege of chairing made recommendations to the Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky boards of education in regard to a new pattern of educational government for that metropolitan area. In keeping with the program, financial, and consumer values just reported to you, our team recommended a mixed pattern of educational government for that metropolitan area. Briefly, that design called for the creation of a metropolitan education district covering the entire metropolitan area, as well as the establishment of a number of local community, semi-independent districts with their own boards of education. The Metropolitan Education District would be governed by a nine member metropolitan education commission to be elected from the metropolitan area. The commission would have strong fiscal powers, whereas the local school district boards would be responsible for operating the schools of the region.

The establishment of a number of semi-independent local school districts was designed to bring schools closer to the people and to offer citizens increased opportunity to participate in educational policy making. Interviews which were conducted with many community leaders at the time of the study in the metropolitan area indicated an intense desire on their part to be involved in school affairs, especially in ways that would permit them genuine opportunities to effect the direction in which schools were moving in the metropolitan region.

The recommendations, the study team argued, combined the advantages to be achieved through consolidation of the districts of Louisville and Jefferson County with the advantages that are present in small school districts. The recommended pattern of metropolitan educational government separated fiscal control from everyday management of schools, permitting the metropolitan education commission to focus on problems of school finance while the local community districts gave their attention to the development of the strongest educational programs possible.

The metropolitan education district would have responsibility for providing basic school support necessary to finance the educational programs of the local districts, plus special needs funds to assist local districts with educational problems that demanded extra money. The metropolitan district would also assume responsibility for all school construction, some special educational programs, a school construction division, a research and planning division, and centralized services such as data processing, purchasing, warehousing and the like.

The recommendations were precedent-setting in the sense that they separated, to a considerable degree, fiscal problems from operational problems. They were also precedent-setting in the sense that they called for the breaking up of the Louisville Public Schools and the Jefferson County Public Schools into several semi-independent local community school districts. The problems of defining new local district boundaries were staggering to say the least. The questions of racial composition of the new districts, ethnicity, economic homogeneity, and natural and man made barriers were also difficult to solve. The boards of education and the citizens have been wrestling with these issues since 1966. The school boards have committed themselves to the implementation of this governmental design and are continuing to seek the legislation required. It failed by a small margin in the 1968 Kentucky legislature.

The issues which prompted the recommendations for Louisville seem to be similar to the questions regarding school government in other metropolitan areas; such issues are growing in importance throughout the nation. The problems, although always somewhat unique in each metropolitan area, have certain common bases. As indicated earlier there is interest in rethinking educational government in many metropolitan areas throughout the country. The state of Missouri is considering organizing itself into twenty districts patterned somewhat on the Louisville design. It would be inappropriate to recommend that the Louisville-Jefferson County pattern of government be adopted in wholesale fashion throughout the nation. But I

do believe that some of the thinking which went into those recommendations is applicable to other parts of the country. Two major 1968 surveys of Ohio large city school systems, Columbus and Cincinnati, included recommendations that metropolitan educational districts be considered in both of those SMSA's.⁸

Returning more directly to the decentralization issue within large cities I would like to advance again some recommendations made at a conference at the University of Chicago in May 1967.⁹ The conference was on the "Educational Component of the Model Cities Program." My paper contained (among other suggestions) arguments for experimentation with new forms of educational government within the model city sectors of large cities as a prelude to large scale educational government reform. There has been some experimentation since that time as we all know.

Two Types of Models

Invention Model

At that time I saw essentially two classes of model city experiments: invention and adaptation. The first of these would include models of the completely planned, future-oriented urban environment without reference to existing economic, political or social institutions. Such a model would be an invention. It would be constructed on the basis of "test tube" values apprehended and articulated by planners. From my limited information, I would suspect the Spilhaus effort in Minnesota would be of this variety. An invented model city would be the ultimate in planning--all possible relations

between physical features and social structures would be acknowledged. Housing, public services, economic enterprises, populations, aesthetics, and private institutions would be incorporated in an intricate and detailed fashion. As far as populations are concerned quotas could be formulated along age, sex, socio-economic, ethnic and religious lines. Housing could be differentiated according to income criteria but integrated in terms of racial, religious and socio-economic components. The society would be an "open" system in some ways but "closed" in others. That is, the social order would be capable of assimilating new technical and social inputs but it would be "closed" in terms of sharp, radical externally imposed modifications that could threaten the operating vitality or significance of the system.

Planning inputs for the inventive model could be drawn from a vast array of disciplines and professions. Obvious choices would be architecture, planning, economics, political science, philosophy, education, sociology, medicine and engineering.

The advantages of the inventive model are apparent: (1) it would permit a free flow of idea inputs limited only by resource availability; (2) it would be essentially a creative effort and attract political support from the under thirty population which appears to be searching for new purposes; (3) it should be less threatening to established institutions if the proposal calls for the building of a total and somewhat autonomous society; and (4) it should stimulate a series of institutional systems as each works at the design of its own component, i.e. medicine, social work, housing, and education.

Adaptation Model

The second variety of demonstration city would be essentially an "adaptive model." It would be created out of existing social, political and economic systems but capable of substantial adaptation in order to achieve a set of values which would have been locally determined. Adaptive model proposals should be undertaken in those parts of existing urban sectors where there is enough social, economic and political stability to carry the adaptations. There do not seem to be dependable guidelines relative to the critical mass or population density which is optimum for satisfactory urban living. Lynch has developed a series of metropolitan patterns (the galaxy, the dispersal, the core, the urban star, and the ring) which are useful images for us to reflect on as we select the urban values we hope to maximize.¹⁰ The galaxy of settlements image appeals to me. One can visualize, decades from now, a network of interrelated units comprising urban galaxies. It would seem useful to establish some population ranges, say one hundred thousand to two hundred fifty thousand per unit, as a criterion for planning model city components. Such a range could serve for both inventive and adaptive proposals.¹¹

The adaptive classification has some obvious advantages. First of all it would require less initial capital outlay for physical renewal. Second, it may offer more short range as well as long range social stability for the environment. Third, it should build on existing value systems and avoid the disintegrating consequences of value system "wipe out." Fourth,

it may permit the statement and eventual understanding of urban change goals within a manageable target population, which ought to possess an internal leadership reservoir capable of acting on its aspirations. And finally, it would permit existing institutions, such as schools, to build on present strengths and evolve new directions within a more stable context.

It is increasingly apparent that local problems will not be and cannot be "solved" at the state or federal levels. That is not to say that resources from those levels cannot be useful in assisting local units in problem solving. We are still engaging in the "search for community" that Dewey described thirty years ago.¹² It may well be that the drafting of new community systems will be the exercise that, temporarily at least, will re-establish significance in local affairs and kindle a desire to invest effort toward problem solving.

The separation of government into small autonomous units is not at all original. Within our large cities we have had experience with the extremes in decentralization as well as centralization. Philadelphia at one time was divided into more than eighty independent districts with their own boards. Prior to 1896 New York City was similarly fragmented, which led to a chaotic state and eventually to its present centralized structure.

Westby, a student of Paul Mort at Columbia, proposed in 1947 that the New York City school system move toward a reestablishment of school communities within New York City.¹³ Accompanying the recommendations were plans for extending citizen involvement through a network of advisory groups. The proposals to New York City were based upon a comparison of educational

innovations, school-community contacts, and community structures between eight definable areas within New York City and eight similar suburban and hinterland communities outside of New York City. Westby discovered substantial differences which suggested to him that the New York City communities needed more autonomy, more control over their own destinies and that such could be achieved within the then existing New York City centralized format.

An exciting venture, such as a genuine demonstration cities effort might become, should not be dependent upon any other political sub-division for determining its destiny. If model cities are effectively designed and do thrive, they could spell the division of the nation's so called great cities into semi-autonomous parts of the galaxy which Lynch foresees as a possible pattern of future urban development. There may need to be a galaxy layer of government eventually.

For the present I would advocate, for the adaptive model city at least, a comprehensive attempt to perfect a new pattern of local general government based upon wide-spread citizen involvement. The charter or constitution approach may be an appropriate format to pursue. In the event a charter approach were chosen it would require the assistance of appropriate "experts" in local government, administrative science and law. There is need for judicious selection and involvement of local influentials in a charter process for the purpose of legitimation, obviously, but also for their inputs into the formulation of the new governmental systems.

All of this may seem rather remote in terms of today's disputes about community control and uncertainty in regard to decentralization. I recite it simply to make a point. We need desperately to press ahead with further thinking about effective ways to achieve decentralization. Several students of decentralization should be working full time on developing ideas about what functions and responsibilities can best be decentralized and which should remain with the central office.

Summary

Lest this audience conclude that I have avoided the basic question--is decentralization a partial answer in big city school districts?--let me respond directly. It is a partial answer--no more than that. Indeed it may prove to be only a temporary, partial answer. If the purpose is local control we know that the delegation of complete operational responsibilities to units as small as neighborhoods, including local boards of education, will not result in autonomous existence. The forces which impinge on all institutions at whatever level are so subtle, pervasive and powerful that total control at any level cannot be achieved. Roald Campbell burst that bubble in his magnificent essay of a decade ago: "The Folklore of Local Control." But this does not reduce the imperative of experimentation.

Some of you saw the Public Broadcast Laboratory presentation on community control on February 2. That magnificent visual essay told the story. The people in ghettos are not going to let go of the concept of community control. Despite the mixed views held by some ghetto residents on the concept

of community control, support for the idea is sweeping through New York City and will do so elsewhere. The strongest and most intelligent of its advocates know that there is nothing magic in it, that education will not be remarkably improved in the short range, that all citizens are not prepared (in a middle class white sense) to assume responsibilities for genuine community control. But neither were the founding fathers.

Advocates of community control have several motives. Among them are (1) commitment to the egalitarian ethic that citizen participation is in itself a prima facie good and to be encouraged in all public arenas, (2) black militant arguments that black children are victimized by white bureaucratic school systems, (3) belief that neighborhood residents can discern particular local needs better than non-residents, (4) belief that schools are controlled by a professional bureaucracy which rules in its own interests, and (5) such great frustration with the existing structures that virtually any change appears attractive which can be effected with some hope of success.

Notwithstanding the potential benefits (and there would appear to be several) of school decentralization, such revisions in themselves would be insufficient remedy for the organizational ills of urban school systems. Some of the attractiveness of these proposals undoubtedly rests in the hope that they will reduce the conflict level surrounding urban school affairs. By shifting the locus of policy making from the maelstrom of cross pressures which characterize city boards of education to more homogeneous neighborhood levels this may in fact occur. However, no matter how pressing the need to manage conflict in urban school systems may be, the performance of this function must not be seen as a substitute for the responsibility to provide educational services. While decentralization may bring peace to troubled city schools, there is little to indicate that it would lead automatically to improved education. Decentralization in other words is by itself no more a panacea than other alleged cures of longer standing,

such as smaller classes and compensatory programs. Indeed it seems likely that decentralization could result in reduced service levels in particular areas of some school systems.¹⁴

As responsible educational leaders our task is to clarify our own thinking on this issue. We must understand what community control means and what decentralization means. We need to set up a national center to study emergent community control phenomena; to formulate patterns of decentralization; to test out those patterns through simulation or other laboratory devices; to prepare administrators to work in community control schools.

The weaknesses inherent in atomizing city districts into purely autonomous districts are very visible to us. They are not to the people who are crying out for a voice. I think we dare not stand in the way. To the contrary we should be on the vanguard, working our way to new solutions with the people.

Footnotes

¹John W. Gardner, No Easy Victories. New York, Evanston, and London: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968, p. 68.

²Raphael O. Nystrand, Student Unrest in Public Schools. Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones Publishing Company, 1969.

³These interviews were conducted by Russell Spillman a staff member at the Cooperative Educational Research Laboratory, Inc., during the early autumn of 1968.

⁴Luvern L. Cunningham and Raphael O. Nystrand, New Forms of Citizen Participation in School Affairs. Columbus, Ohio: College of Education, 1968 (mimeographed). This report is to be published by the Urban Coalition early in 1969.

⁵John R. Everett, "The Fight to Run the Schools." The Atlantic, Vol. 222, December, 1968, p. 73.

⁶For an elegant review of this matter as well as the larger issues in community control see Leonard J. Fein, "Community Schools and Social Theory: The Limits of Universalism," paper presented at the Conference on the Community School. Sponsored by the Brookings Institution, December 1968, (mimeographed).

⁷Luvern L. Cunningham, Archie Dykes, James Kincheloe, and Vincent Ostrom, The Merger Issue. Louisville, Kentucky: Louisville and Jefferson County, Kentucky Public School Systems, August, 1966.

⁸See The Ohio State University Advisory Commission on the Problems Facing the Columbus Public Schools, A Report to the Columbus Board of Education. Columbus, Ohio: College of Education, The Ohio State University, 1968. Also Roald F. Campbell, et.al., A Survey of the Cincinnati Public Schools. Chicago: Midwest Administration Center, University of Chicago, 1968.

⁹Much of this part of the paper is drawn from Luvern L. Cunningham, "Models for Model City Government," in Roald F. Campbell, Lucy Ann Marks, and Raphael O. Nystrand, Education and Urban Renaissance. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Chapter IX, 1969.

¹⁰Kevin Lynch, "The Pattern of the Metropolis," Daedalus. Winter, 1961, pp. 91-94.

¹¹Hirsch argues for a range of 100,000 to 250,000. See Werner Z. Hirsch, "Administrative and Fiscal Considerations in Urban Development," The Annals. Vol. 352, March, 1964, p. 48.

¹²John Dewey, The Public and Its Problem. Denver: Alan Swallow, 1927, Chapter V.

¹³Cleve O. Westby, Local Autonomy for School-Communities in Cities. Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, New York, 1947.

¹⁴Raphael O. Nystrand and Luvern L. Cunningham, "Federated Urban School Systems: Compromising the Centralization - Decentralization Issue." (To appear in a volume to be edited by Frank Lutz) mimeographed, 1969.